United Nations S/2000/643

Security Council

Distr.: General
30 June 2000

Original: English

Report of the Secretary-General on Ethiopia and Eritrea

I. Introduction

1. In my report dated 2 June 2000 (S/2000/530), I informed the Security Council that the proximity talks between Ethiopia and Eritrea, conducted under the chairmanship of the Minister of Justice of Algeria and the Personal Envoy of the Current Chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Ahmed Ouyahia, had resumed in Algiers on 29 May. I am now pleased to report that those talks have culminated in the signing, on 18 June 2000, of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea by the Foreign Ministers of both countries, under the auspices of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, in his capacity as the Current Chairman of OAU. The talks were conducted with the assistance of the Personal Envoy of the Presidency of the European Union, Rino Serri, and the representative of the President of the United States, Anthony Lake.

II. Provisions of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities

2. Under the Agreement, which was circulated on 19 June 2000 as a document of the Security Council (S/2000/601), the parties have committed themselves to:

(a) Resolving the present crisis and any other dispute between them through peaceful and legal means in accordance with the principles enshrined in the Charters of OAU and the United Nations;

(b) Rejecting the use of force as a means of imposing solutions to disputes;

(c) Respecting the borders existing at independence, as stated in OAU resolution AHG/Res 16 (1), adopted in Cairo in 1964, and in this regard determining them on the basis of pertinent colonial treaties and applicable international law, making use, to that end, of technical means to demarcate the borders and, in case of controversy, to resort to the appropriate means of arbitration.

3. The Agreement commits the parties to an immediate cessation of hostilities and stipulates that, starting from the signature of the Agreement, all air and land attacks are to cease. The parties have also reaffirmed their acceptance of the OAU Framework Agreement and the modalities for its implementation.

4. Under the Agreement, the parties called upon the United Nations, in cooperation with OAU, to establish a peacekeeping operation to assist in the implementation of the Agreement and guaranteed to ensure free movement and access for the peacekeeping mission and its supplies, as required, through their territories and to respect its members, installations and equipment.

5. Under the Agreement, Ethiopia shall submit to the peacekeeping mission redeployment plans for its troops from positions taken after 6 February 1999 which were not under Ethiopian administration before 6 May 1998. This redeployment is to take place within two weeks after the deployment of the peacekeeping mission and is to be verified by it. For its part, Eritrea is to maintain its forces at a distance of 25 kilometres (artillery range) from positions to which the Ethiopian forces are to redeploy. This zone of separation is to be referred to as the "temporary security zone".

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6. The Agreement also calls for the United Nations and OAU to establish a Military Coordination Commission, to be composed of representatives of both parties under the chairmanship of the head of the peacekeeping mission. The tasks of the Commission would be to coordinate and resolve issues relating to the implementation of the mandate of the mission, in particular, military issues arising during the implementation period.

7. In particular, the Agreement calls upon the United Nations peacekeeping operation to carry out the following tasks:

(a) Monitor the cessation of hostilities;

(b) Monitor the redeployment of Ethiopian forces;

(c) Ensure the observance of the security commitments agreed to by the two parties (described in para. 5 above);

(d) Monitor the temporary security zone.

8. The Agreement also calls upon the Security Council to adopt "appropriate measures" under chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should one or both parties violate their respective commitments. Other provisions of the Agreement concern demining activities to be conducted as soon as possible by both parties with the technical assistance of the United Nations, with a view to creating conditions necessary to the deployment of the peacekeeping mission and the return of civilian administration and of the population.

9. In accordance with the Agreement, the mandate of the peacekeeping operation would terminate when the delimitation/demarcation process has been completed.

III. Observations and recommendations

10. The Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, negotiated under the auspices of OAU and signed by the two parties at Algiers on 18 June 2000, is the first but extremely vital step towards the restoration of peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea. I welcome this long-awaited Agreement, and I am gratified that the parties have found a means of halting the devastating fighting that has resulted in the loss of numerous lives and immense destruction.

11. The protracted conflict has compounded the already devastating effects of the drought in the two countries. It is estimated that in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the war displaced at least 1.2 million people, 70 per cent of whom are women, children and the elderly. Many of the internally displaced persons live in extremely difficult conditions without shelter, proper sanitation or regular access to food and water. Many thousands more have had to seek refuge across the Sudanese border. An estimated 10 million Ethiopians and Eritreans have been affected by the lack of rain for three consecutive years. Landmines further compound the situation in a number of war-affected areas, in particular, the Tigray region in Ethiopia and the area surrounding Barentu town in Eritrea. It is essential that the donor community respond generously to the humanitarian appeal for the Horn of Africa launched by the United Nations on 7 June 2000.

12. I hope that the envisaged second phase of the proximity talks, to be held shortly under the auspices of OAU, will succeed in assisting the parties in arriving at a lasting, peaceful resolution to the outstanding issues, including the delimitation and demarcation of the border. I urge the two parties to cooperate fully with OAU in these efforts.

13. Meanwhile, in accordance with the Agreement, the Government of Eritrea has addressed to me a letter dated 20 June 2000 (S/2000/612), requesting that the United Nations take the measures necessary to assist the parties in the implementation of the cessation of hostilities. In a letter dated 26 June 2000 (S/2000/627), the Government of Ethiopia has addressed a similar request to the United Nations.

14. In order to facilitate the earliest implementation of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, I intend to dispatch very shortly a reconnaissance mission to the region to discuss with OAU and the parties the modalities of possible United Nations assistance for its implementation. On the basis of its findings, the mission will make recommendations to me concerning a concept of operations for a United Nations peacekeeping mission. I intend to consult OAU and the parties on the recommendations and thereafter to present my proposals in this regard to the Security Council in late July 2000.

15. I also intend to dispatch, simultaneously with the reconnaissance mission, an appropriate number of liaison officers to each capital. These officers would

liaise with the parties and OAU and assist in the planning for a United Nations peacekeeping operation.

16. Subject to the authorization of the Security Council and the concurrence of the parties, the liaison officers would be followed within the next few weeks by the deployment of a military observer group. It is envisaged that up to a total of 100 United Nations military observers would gradually be deployed to each country over the next two months, pending the establishment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation. The United Nations military observer group would work closely with the military observers to be deployed by OAU, who would maintain a separate identity and chain of command. The tasks of the United Nations and OAU observer groups would be to liaise with the parties; visit their military headquarters in Addis Ababa, Asmara and in the field; verify any major violations of the ceasefire; prepare for the establishment of the Military Coordination Committee provided for in the Agreement; and assist in the planning of the full-fledged operation and in the establishment of an advance headquarters for it. A number of the observers would also be co-located with the military headquarters of the parties at the division/regiment level.

17. To expedite their deployment, some of the United Nations military observers would be drawn from existing United Nations peacekeeping missions. The United Nations military observer group would be led by a senior military officer and would include civilian staff as necessary, including political, logistic and other personnel. It is expected that the two parties would provide the United Nations and OAU military observer groups with the required assistance, support and protection in the performance of their duties.

18. The financial implications for the steps described above will be provided to the Security Council shortly.

19. I take this opportunity to once again pay tribute to the efforts of OAU, and particularly those of its Current Chairman, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, which resulted in the attainment of the much-awaited cessation of hostilities. I also wish the parties and OAU every success in the speedy conclusion of the proximity talks and will keep the Security Council apprised of developments in this regard. As requested in paragraph 15 of its resolution 1298 (2000) of 17 May 2000, I intend to submit shortly a comprehensive report on the implementation of that resolution and on the humanitarian situation in Eritrea and Ethiopia.